



GAIL SIMMONS; ALAMY



A good walk Fountains Abbey and Markenfield Hall, North Yorkshire

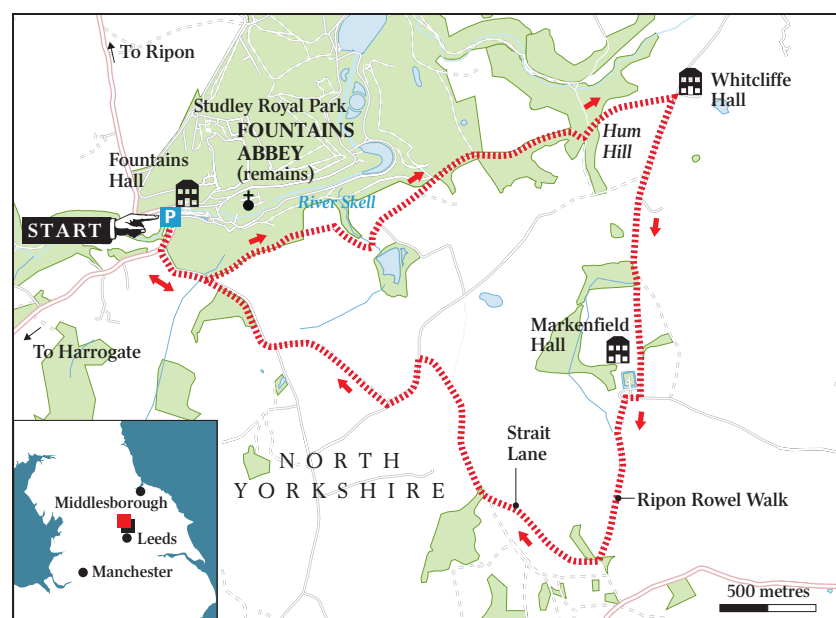
How hard is it?

6 miles; easy; paths, tracks, quiet lanes

Thistles and willowherb, the hot pinks and purples of high summer, are out in force on a quiet country lane leading up from Fountains Hall. I barely blinked as an Austin 7 in British racing green rattled past, and time-slipped back to the 1930s. For this is old-fashioned North Yorkshire, a county of great Cistercian abbeys and aristocratic parkland.

I was soon walking on green tracks through pasture, alongside Fountains Abbey's impressive medieval precinct wall as sheep grazed beneath. The sweet summer scent of mown hay wafted in the warm air, and swallows soared and dived as I passed remote farms with red pantiled roofs against pale blue skies.

The path led to cool woodland — welcome shade after the full sun of the hay meadows. I was following the perimeter of Studley Royal Park, passing an elegant 18th-century archway that resembled a Roman ruin. Leaving the woodland, I followed a line of ancient hawthorns, the North York Moors on the horizon, strolling along a track thick with wildflowers where butterflies and dragonflies flickered past.



I skirted Markenfield Hall, one of the best-preserved moated manor houses in England, now a dusty working farm. A leafy, secretive path became a deep holloway. Tree roots protruded at head height and a startled hare as high as my knee sprinted away.

The holloway opened into fields of ripening wheat, the colourscape morphing from dark greens to rich golds. A buzzard squealed above, scouring the recent harvest for rich pickings, and a kestrel hovered silently over the hedgerow, spying prey too small for human eyes.

Descending the valley along a lane fringed with wild geraniums and yolk-yellow meadow pea, hedgerows entwined with honeysuckle, I enjoyed final views down to Fountains Hall, the high moorland beyond.

And here ended a walk where history and nature were in perfect balance: as satisfying for the heritage enthusiast as for the nature lover.

Start Fountains Abbey West Gate (OS ref SE 270682). More parking at main visitor centre (271687).

Getting there Off the B6265 (Ripon–Pateley Bridge)

Main: Markenfield Hall.
Top right: the remains of an 18th-century archway.
Above right: a swallow

Walk (OS Explorer 298) Leaving West Gate carpark, right; in 150m at fork, left towards Markington, Harrogate (270680); in 280m, left (272678) through farmland then woodland. In 1.5 miles, at junction, keep straight (292686); exit woodland to Hum Hill; in 500m at T-junction with lane, right (296688, Whitcliffe Hall), signs Ripon Rowel Walk. In 570m at gate "Public Bridleway to Markenfield Hall", straight along grassy path (294683); in 450m, right through gap in wall (294678), through trees then open fields, aiming to left of Markenfield Hall; in 620m, at T-junction with driveway, right (295672) past farm buildings then path to left. In 940m, at stile, right along path (292664, Strait Lane); in 700m, through gate (287667) and along edge of two fields; in third field on through middle. In 840m, at lane, left (283674); in 300m, right (282672), then uphill (NB: in wet weather continue along Whitcliffe Lane to T-junction, then right to rejoin route at 276675, below). Over stile and through field; at end bear right (yellow arrow); left through gate; follow field edge to track past farmhouse ("Ninevah"). In 750m, at lane, right (276675); in 800m at T-junction signed Fountains Abbey, right (270680); left into car park.

Lunch It's the perfect walk for a picnic. **Accommodation** Sawley Arms, Sawley, Ripon HG4 3EQ (sawleyarms.co.uk)

More information nidderdaleaonb.org.uk

Gail Simmons

Her book *Between the Chalk and the Sea* is available now

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